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Contact: Rob Blumenthal (202) 224-1010 / Eve Goldsher (202) 224-3751

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CHAIRWOMAN MIKULSKI REMARKS AT DEFENSE HEARING ON THE NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE FY14 BUDGET REOUEST

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Barbara A. Mikulski (D-Md.), Chairwoman of the full Senate Appropriations Committee, today participated in a Defense Subcommittee hearing on the National Guard and Reserve Fiscal Year 2014 Budget Request. The following are Chairwoman Mikulski's remarks, as prepared for delivery:

"Good Morning, I thank you all for being here. This is Senator Durbin's first hearing as Chair of the Defense Subcommittee. The loss of our colleague Senator Inouye was terrible, but I'm looking forward to working with Senator Durbin to get back to regular order and move this bill.

"I want to commend all of our National Guard and Reserve members. The wars in Iraq & Afghanistan have put additional pressures on the National Guard over the last decade. The Guard and Reserve have been called on more than any other time in our history for deployments and increased operations. While the Guard's mission has evolved, the core strengths of its members have stayed constant. Many Members of National Guard and Reserve are civilians. They can apply civilian skills to military roles.

"I recently met with Secretary Hagel Deputy, Secretary Ash Carter, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dempsey. We discussed how sequester is damaging to operations and maintenance of all of our services, as well as our Guard and Reserve. That is why I support the President's budget request level of \$1.058 trillion. It is the same as the deal we made 3 months ago in the American Taxpayer Relief Act, which passed the Senate 89 to 8. A deal should be a deal.

"In contrast, the Ryan budget and sequester level would be \$966 billion. This is \$92 billion less than the President's request. We need a balanced approach to end sequester that includes both revenues and targeted cuts so we can sustain our national security and invest in the future of America.

"Unfortunately, I can't stay for questions today, but I would like to briefly raise the issue of the VA backlog. We've all read the stories about the backlog—unacceptably long wait times, lost paperwork, high rates of errors. A GAO report from March 2013 cited delays in obtaining military records for members of the National Guard as part of the delay in processing claims. We can't allow this to continue. I would like to follow-up with you all to develop an action plan for how to address this."

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